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Summary record of the 27th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
later: Mr. Incera (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Costa Rica)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 153: Human resources management (*continued*) (A/52/438, A/C.5/51/55 and Corr.1, A/52/7, paras. 107-112 and A/C.5/52/2)

1. **Mr. Bond** (United States of America), referring to the implementation of the performance appraisal system (A/C.5/51/55), said it was encouraging to see that the concepts underlying that system – i.e., work planning, monitoring, feedback and appraisal – had generally been received positively by managers and staff, as had the principle of basing appraisals on pre-established performance expectations.

2. The report noted certain difficulties inherent in the introduction of a new system, which should be overcome as those concerned became more familiar with that system. The Secretariat should provide information on the number of staff appraised and the time that would be required to train all managers in the new system. It would also be useful to have more details about the procedures and methodology used to determine how well the system was working.

3. His delegation was very pleased with the family leave programme (A/52/438) because it allowed staff members greater flexibility to use their sick leave to deal with family emergencies and recognized the need for paternity leave. His delegation wished to know exactly what was meant by the "exceptional circumstances" which would make it possible to extend leave without pay beyond the initial two years.

4. His delegation approved of the Secretary-General's proposal in document A/52/439 concerning the step-by-step introduction of performance awards or bonuses.

5. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) said he fully shared the views expressed by the representative of Romania at an earlier meeting concerning the usefulness of the national competitive examinations programme and shared his concern about the proposed reduction in P-1 to P-3 posts.

6. His delegation welcomed the introduction of the new performance appraisal system in 22 departments and offices throughout the Secretariat in 1996, which should lead to more efficient and transparent human resources management. It would like to know why the system had not yet been implemented in all departments. The overall concept and principles on which the system was based seemed to be widely accepted, and both management and staff recognized that the entire process – work planning, ongoing monitoring, feedback and appraisal – would promote the development of a performance-based management culture. It was true that the new system had encountered a number of problems, but there were grounds for believing that they could be solved through technical modifications, given time and greater experience.

7. With regard to the two "misperceptions" mentioned in paragraphs 20 to 22 of the report, it would be advisable to avoid a mathematical, regular distribution of ratings which would impose an excessive rigidity on the new system, and appropriate guidance should be given to those responsible for the ratings. With regard to the argument that a goal-based rating system would not be applicable to the international civil service, it should be noted that similar systems had already been applied to national civil services in some countries and the Secretariat should therefore continue studying and learning from those examples.

8. It should be borne in mind that the performance appraisal system was not an end in itself but was designed to promote a result-based culture of performance. In that context, the proposals concerning the introduction of a system of incentives and rewards and strengthening of the links between the performance appraisal system, staff development and career support mechanisms (paras. 25 (g) and (h)) were particularly important. The new appraisal system would contribute to merit-based career development and thus to more transparent personnel management.

9. **Mr. Bong Hyun Kim** (Republic of Korea) said his delegation approved of the introduction of the new performance appraisal system and was glad to see that almost all departments and offices had begun implementing it in 1996. The criticisms directed at the system led his delegation to believe that it should be simplified and modified. It was particularly important to reduce the number of steps involved, to ensure that forms and guidelines were spelled out in clear and simple language, to make the planning cycle coincide with the budget cycle and to introduce a system of incentives and rewards linked to the use of the appraisal system. Furthermore, in order to make a real contribution to the emergence of a result-based culture of performance, the new appraisal system should be applied in parallel with the result-based budgeting method proposed by the Secretary-General (A/51/950).

10. If it was planned to introduce a system of performance awards and bonuses (A/52/439) the performance appraisal system was the only mechanism by which performance could be properly evaluated. However, since the system was not yet sufficiently well established to support a monetary awards system, non-monetary awards would have to be used during the first stage.

11. His delegation was deeply concerned about the number of United Nations personnel who had lost their lives while

performing their duties. Host countries must take all appropriate steps to ensure the safety and security of United Nations staff and premises. His country was in the process of ratifying the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

12. With regard to the composition of the Secretariat, his delegation reiterated its support for the principle of equitable geographical distribution. There would be a significant number of staff retiring in the coming years; that would provide an opportunity to recruit young staff, particularly in Member States which were underrepresented in the Secretariat. National competitive examinations should be the primary recruitment tool for that purpose. His delegation was concerned to note that one P-4 post and one General Service post had been abolished in the Examinations and Tests Section.

13. **Mr. Ubalijoro** (Rwanda), referring to the question of respect for the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials, which was the subject of document A/C.5/52/2, observed that in the report allusion was made yet again to locally recruited United Nations staff who were allegedly still in prison in Rwanda. He was concerned to note that once again the problem of genocide in Rwanda was being presented in a biased way. The truth was that, when the genocide occurred, Rwandese recruited locally by the United Nations had pleaded in vain for United Nations protection at a time when the Organization was evacuating international staff. In view of that policy of applying two different standards, his country felt obliged to question the ethical standards of the United Nations. The latter bore some of the responsibility for the events in Rwanda and therefore had an obligation to explain itself.

14. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Thailand) said that his delegation attached great importance to the performance appraisal system, a tool which could improve the functioning of the Organization. The report on the subject (A/C.5/51/55) indicated that the system was meeting with certain obstacles and his delegation looked forward to explanations in that regard.

15. Concerning the composition of the Secretariat, he referred to paragraph 77 of document A/52/7, where the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions noted a troubling trend towards a decrease in the number of P-3 and P-2 posts.

16. With regard to the question of privileges and immunities, he was concerned about the number of United Nations staff who had disappeared recently and considered that host countries must do everything possible to guarantee the safety of such staff.

17. **Mr. Liu Yanguo** (China) considered that the new performance appraisal system for staff was a welcome initiative that would motivate United Nations staff and contribute to the emergence of a result-based management style. The Secretariat should draw the relevant conclusions from the first stage of the experiment by noting the reactions and comments of managers and staff. There remained some problems to be resolved. Departments clearly varied greatly, working methods differed and the performance appraisal system should be adapted accordingly. The Secretariat, which had devoted considerable human and financial resources to the initiative, should continue its efforts to ensure cost-effectiveness.

18. With regard to the problem of the safety of United Nations personnel, he said that it was essential for the host countries to take effective measures to protect the lives and property of such personnel, as they had undertaken to do, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant conventions.

19. Lastly, he welcomed the measures with respect to family leave, which should improve working conditions for United Nations staff members.

Agenda item 113: Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors (A/52/261, A/52/381 and A/52/518)

(b) United Nations Institute for Training and Research (A/52/5/Add.4)

(c) Voluntary funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/52/5/Add.5)

20. **Sir John Bourn** (Chairman of the Board of Auditors) introduced the reports of the Board of Auditors on the voluntary funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (A/52/5/Add.5) and on the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (A/52/5/Add.4) for the financial period ended 31 December 1996, together with a concise summary of the principal findings, conclusions and recommendations of those reports (A/52/261), as requested in General Assembly resolution 47/211 of 23 December 1992. The Board had, as in the past, set out in the annexes of the two reports its comments on the measures taken by the Administration to implement the Board's previous recommendations. In addition, it had introduced a new section highlighting previous recommendations not fully implemented and pointing out with greater precision incidents of malpractice and violation of rules and regulations, as requested in paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 51/225.

21. During the biennium the Board of Auditors had maintained close cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the internal audit services of the various organizations, thus ensuring the coordination of audit activities. The Audit Operations Committee had also exchanged information on issues of mutual interest with the Joint Inspection Unit.

22. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) had discussed the Board's reports on UNHCR and UNITAR with the Audit Operations Committee. The Board had taken note of the Advisory Committee's request for the Board to monitor the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of Internal Oversight Services and UNHCR concerning the provision of Internal Audit services and to report on the adequacy of the arrangement.

23. With regard to the Board's principal findings on the voluntary funds administered by UNHCR, he said that as far as previous recommendations not fully implemented were concerned the main persistent irregularities were the non-assessment of the capabilities of implementing partners; delays in the submission of project-monitoring reports; the selective basis on which work plans were prepared; and the failure of implementing partners to maintain separate accounts for UNHCR funds.

24. Regarding financial issues, UNHCR had, on the Board's recommendation, initiated action to obtain audit certificates for the expenditure incurred by the implementing partners in 1995, but no such certificates had been received in respect of 1996 expenditure. In addition, the Board considered that UNHCR should urgently review the current practice of recording cash advances to the implementing partners as programme expenditure.

25. Where programme management was concerned, no norms had been fixed for programme delivery and administrative support costs; in 1996 the actual rates had varied from 32 per cent to 48 per cent of the total programme budget. There had also been delays in signing sub-agreements with implementing partners; work plans had not been prepared in many cases; and project monitoring reports had been received very late. The Board had made recommendations on all those points.

26. With regard to consultants, the Board had noted shortcomings in the terms of reference for candidates and in their selection and evaluation; in many cases the same consultants had been engaged repeatedly. The Board had recommended appropriate measures to rectify the situation, including the maintenance of a central roster of consultants.

27. On asset management, the Board had recommended that the MINDER Asset Tracking System should be upgraded to make possible the electronic transfer of data from the procurement system to the asset management system and that the Administration should undertake a physical verification of all assets.

28. With regard to the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Board's recommendations (A/52/381), one of those recommendations was that UNHCR should ensure that audit certificates were received on time from implementing partners.

29. With regard to the Board's report on UNITAR, the single persistent irregularity noted concerned the question of clearing long-outstanding deficits on Special Purpose Grants Fund projects. Deficits totalling $283,215 on 11 projects had been the subject of protracted discussions between the Institute and the United Nations. The Board had once again urged the Institute to settle the matter, which had long been outstanding.

30. In relation to financial issues, the Board had been concerned at the lack of available funds to secure the long-term future of the General Fund. There also remained the issue of nearly $100,000 in charges incurred at United Nations Headquarters but disputed by the Institute. The Board had also recommended that the Institute should carry out a review of the collectibles from donors of amounts outstanding on Special Purpose Grants Fund projects.

31. In the area of programme management the Board had found significant lapses in documentation, particularly concerning the way in which participating countries and partners had been selected, and had recommended that the Institute should ensure clear linkages between its training events and the specific objectives of the relevant programme.

32. Turning to the question of the term of office of the members of Board, he recalled that the Board had favoured the adoption of a six-year term, which represented three biennial accounting cycles, thereby ensuring a smooth pattern of rotation and making it possible for members to contribute more effectively to the work of the United Nations.

33. The Board had been pleased to see in the Advisory Committee's first report on the proposed programme budget for 1998-1999 (A/52/7, paras. 98-106) the comments on the increasing demands for independent audits and management reviews of the United Nations system. The Board, which had often expressed its concern at such demands from donors of extrabudgetary funds, very much welcomed the Advisory Committee's statement that the secretariats of the

organizations and agencies concerned had no power to conclude arrangements for audit by national authorities without prior approval from the competent legislative bodies.

34. The Board had started work on the reviews requested during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, including the requests for reviews of the Integrated Management Information System, the International Civil Service Commission and the Iraq escrow account. The Board would also be submitting to the Assembly early in 1998 its proposals for improving the implementation of its recommendations.

35. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the beginning of paragraph 13 of document A/52/518 should be corrected to read, "With regard to *internal* audit". He then introduced the main observations made by the Advisory Committee in that report, which concerned the reports of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (A/52/5/Add.4) and on the voluntary funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (A/52/5/Add.5). Following an exchange of views with the Audit Operations Committee, the Advisory Committee, having been informed that there were certain advantages to the submission of biennial instead of annual audit reports for UNHCR and UNITAR, as in the case of other United Nations bodies, requested the Executive Director of UNITAR and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to consult with the Board of Auditors on the implications of that change.

36. In paragraphs 5 to 9 of its report, the Advisory Committee expressed its concern about the problems relating to the need for the implementing partners of UNHCR to account for the management and use of funds, which the Board of Auditors had mentioned repeatedly in recent years. In paragraph 7, the Advisory Committee stressed that all implementing partners, whether government or non-governmental agencies, were under the obligation, without exception, to honour the agreement they had freely entered into with UNHCR regarding the management of resources donated by Member States.

37. The Advisory Committee was informed that UNHCR intended to establish, for projects implemented by national non-governmental organizations, a threshold value of $100,000 for the application of the requirements for an audit certificate. The detailed information which the Advisory Committee had received on the subject was summarized in paragraph 9 of its report. Notwithstanding the threshold value, the Advisory Committee believed that for projects below $100,000 there should be at least one audit during the life of a project. That was similar to the procedure followed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

38. With respect to asset management, the Advisory Committee had requested the High Commissioner to take into account the need to establish a fully integrated system, which should make possible the tracking of assets from start to finish and which could be based on the system developed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

39. The Advisory Committee had also made recommendations concerning, on the one hand, the use of consultants in UNHCR, and, on the other, the urgent need to review the criteria for classifying UNHCR expenditures as administrative, programme delivery and operational, so as to avoid any confusion.

40. The Advisory Committee's comments on UNITAR appeared in paragraphs 14 to 17 of its report. The Advisory Committee requested the United Nations Administration to seek the advice of the Office of Legal Affairs in order to settle the question of the outstanding debt of UNITAR towards the United Nations.

41. *Ms. Incera (Costa Rica), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Agenda item 116: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (*continued*) (A/52/6 (vol. II), A/52/16 and Add.1 and A/52/7 (sect. II, Parts VII-XII))

Section 26. Public information (*continued*)

42. **Ms. Buergo Rodriguez** (Cuba), noting the regrettable disparities with regard to the number of languages in which documents were published, asked about the linguistic policies applied to information activities and drew attention to General Assembly resolution 50/11 on multilingualism, which was not being observed in that regard. She wished to know why only the Economic Commission for Europe received press releases and reports intended for release to the media.

43. With regard to the abolition of posts, her delegation asked what the repercussions would be on the implementation of activities, since the Secretariat also referred to the problems caused by the shortage of resources. Those resources should be increased, and her delegation hoped, in particular, that the *United Nations Chronicle* would again be published in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and Russian. She would like to see a written explanation of the criteria that had been used to choose the posts that were abolished. She would also like more specific information on what principles were used as a basis for attaching so much

importance, in section 26, to activities relating to non-governmental organizations.

44. Lastly, her delegation regretted that the Committee on Information had been unable to review the work of the task force established by the Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform to examine the activities of the Department of Public Information, and expressed the hope that the Secretary-General's report on that matter could be submitted on time for the General Assembly to consider it in an appropriate way.

45. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) replied that the Economic Commission for Europe received press releases because, unlike the other regional commissions, it did not have its own press service.

Section 27. Administrative services (*continued*)

Section 27A. Office of the Secretary-General for Administration and Management (*continued*)

Section 27B. Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts (*continued*)

Section 27C. Office of Human Resources Management (*continued*)

Section 27D. Support Services (*continued*)

Section 27E. Conference Services (*continued*)

Section 27F. Administration, Geneva (*continued*)

Section 27G. Administration, Vienna (*continued*)

Section 27H. Administration, Nairobi (*continued*)

46. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that, while favouring the efforts to rationalize common support services and to improve efficiency, he nonetheless felt that such efforts should be pursued with complete transparency, in particular in collaboration with the competent intergovernmental bodies.

47. With regard to staff training and development programmes, his delegation believed, along with the Advisory Committee, that an evaluation of United Nations training activities as a whole was necessary. As for procurement, five gratis personnel on non-reimbursable loan had been contributed at the P-3 level, while five permanent posts would be abolished. His delegation was concerned at that situation because it entailed the risk of a conflict of interest, and because the staff members were not subject to United Nations regulations. His delegation endorsed the comments of the Advisory Committee with regard to the proposed reclassification of a D-1 post to D-2. It also agreed with the Advisory Committee that the Organization should resort increasingly to competitive bidding in an effort to reach a wider geographical area, especially including the developing countries, and that sufficient resources ought to be provided for that purpose.

48. As for the use of new technologies, his delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that it would be a good idea to set up an information technology task force to recommend a long-term strategy and plan of action in that area. It would like to see higher priority given to record-keeping (para. 27D.76-78 of the proposed programme budget).

49. Lastly, his delegation emphasized the need to end the uncertainty surrounding the financing of the United Nations Office at Nairobi by giving it the necessary resources.

50. **Ms. Buergo Rodriguez** (Cuba) expressed concern at the difficulty the Advisory Committee was having obtaining information on proposals intended to streamline and reorient management of the Secretariat. She agreed with the Advisory Committee regarding the three pilot projects established at ECLAC, the United Nations Office at Vienna and in Conference Services, and hoped that the Secretariat would submit a detailed document on those proposals early enough for the General Assembly to be able to consider it.

51. She noted that in practically all the programmes under Part VIII (Common support services) there had been a considerable reduction in the number of posts. For example, under section 27B, Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, a decrease of 3.6 per cent was being proposed against the appropriations for the current biennium, however, the Secretary had been unable to provide the Advisory Committee with the financial statements and tables it needed to consider the proposed programme budget nor those relating to the gratis personnel. She drew attention to paragraphs VIII.26 and VIII.29 of the report of the Advisory Committee and to paragraph 53 of document A/C.5/51/53. A similar situation existed in the Office of Human Resources Management (section 27C), where a number of posts were to be abolished. She recalled that her delegation had asked the Secretariat to give it, in writing, justifications for all the proposed cuts in posts. As the Advisory Committee had pointed out in paragraph VIII.42 of its report, it was essential to ensure that what was being delegated should be clearly spelled out in writing. Her delegation was concerned at the difficulties being experienced in the staff development and training programmes and in the language training programmes and it hoped that the necessary resources would be provided so that those activities could be continued during the next biennium.

52. With regard to Support Services (section 27D) her delegation would like to know why a number of posts were being abolished, particularly in view of General Assembly resolution 51/243 which provided for the gradual phasing out of gratis personnel. The provisions of that resolution should be fully implemented.

53. Her delegation was particularly concerned by the proposed 6 per cent reduction in resources for Conference Services (section 27E) and had already spoken at length on the subject during the general debate on the pattern of conferences. It supported the comments by the Advisory Committee regarding the introduction of net budgeting and pointed out that the Committee was still waiting for the document the Secretariat was preparing on the issue. Finally, she associated herself with the comments made by the representative of Algeria concerning the Office of the United Nations at Nairobi.

Section 28. Internal oversight (*continued*)

54. **Ms. Silot** (Cuba) while recognizing the importance of the work done by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, noted that the resources proposed for the Office represented an increase of 16.9 per cent over the current biennium – with regard to travel the increase was 43.4 per cent – and that 8 additional posts had been charged to the regular budget. She associated herself with those who believed that that growth, for what was not considered a priority activity, was excessive. She hoped that the Secretariat would take those comments into account and would make the necessary adjustments. Since the Office of Internal Oversight Services was urging all services to improve the management of their resources, it should set a good example. Paragraph 28.5 of the proposed programme budget showed an imbalance between the distribution of resources and the work programme: the resources allocated to subprogramme 1 (Central evaluation) was quite low compared to those allocated to the other subprogrammes. Her delegation would like to know what criteria had been used when distributing the resources among the subprogrammes.

55. According to paragraph 28.3 of the proposed programme budget, the relationship between the Office and the operational funds and programmes would be more substantively defined. Her delegation wondered what mandate the Office had for making that proposal. She also pointed out that the Office was planning to continue using the services of P-3 and P-4 gratis personnel; her delegation agreed with the comments made by the Advisory Committee in that connection in paragraph IX.7 of its report.

56. Referring to the description of subprogramme 1 (para. 28.17 of the proposed programme budget), she said that she was very concerned to see that the Office might seek to alter the content and, if necessary, the objectives of the main programmes of the Organization. She strongly supported the proposal to delete the phrase. She took note of the functions of the Audit and Management Consulting Division (para. 28.33 of the proposed programme budget) but drew attention to the fact that some of its activities might duplicate those of other bodies.

57. **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt) pointed out that in view of the specificity of the work done by the Office of Internal Oversight Services it was essential to avoid conflicts of interest. His delegation supported the comments made by the Advisory Committee concerning the gratis personnel and would like to know why the Secretariat proposed to continue using such personnel during the next biennium; the same applied to consultants. His delegation would like to know why it was estimated that the Office would have 450 cases of fraud to investigate in the next two years, when it had had only 191 in 1996. His delegation supported the proposal by the Committee on Programme and Coordination that the phrase "by altering their content and, if necessary, reviewing their objectives" in para. 28.17 should be deleted. It was in favour of strengthening coordination between the Office, the Board of External Auditors and the Joint Inspection Unit in order to limit duplication and reduce costs.

58. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller), responding to questions, said that the growth in the Office of Internal Oversight Services was more apparent than real. He recalled that in 1996-1997 the Office had been given a considerable number of new posts, but those posts had been budgeted at only 50 per cent of their cost. The increase in estimates of expenditure for 1998-1999 simply reflected full budgeting of those posts; no new posts had been established. The Committee would revert to the question of gratis personnel in the context of its consideration of the reports on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/243.

59. The number of cases of fraud to be handled by the Office over the upcoming biennium was only a working hypothesis. It was obviously impossible to know in advance the number of cases which the Office would be dealing with. Regarding the narrative of subprogramme 1, that was only a question of formulation. Amendment of programme content and objectives was the exclusive preserve of the General Assembly. With respect to relations between the Office and United Nations funds and programmes, the Committee had before it a report describing the situation in detail.

Section 29. Jointly financed administrative activities

Section 30. Special expenses

60. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that his delegation had asked the Advisory Committee to provide the Fifth Committee with a list of its recommendations on jointly financed activities, with an indication of the financial implications of those recommendations. He wished the submission to include the recommendations formulated by the Advisory Committee in its first report on the programme budget on the net budgeting system proposed by the Secretary-General. With regard to the proposal by the Joint Inspection Unit for the abolition of one P-5 and one General Service post and the establishment of three other posts at the Professional level, he wished to know how the Secretariat intended to proceed, given that as at May 1997, according to information provided to the Advisory Committee, there had been no vacancies in the Joint Inspection Unit.

61. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) expressed his delegation's concern over net budgeting, which meant a reduction in the budget of $39.2 million. He endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendations in paragraph 45 of its first report on the proposed programme budget (A/52/7) and asked what the implications were in view of article 20 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit and of article 21 of the statute of the International Civil Service Commission, which provided that the budgets of those two bodies should be included in the regular budget of the United Nations. He asked what the situation would be under the new system. Further, his delegation wished to know on what legal basis the United Nations, in the absence of an appropriation, could advance funds to the Joint Inspection Unit and the Commission pending receipt of contributions from the participating agencies. He wondered what the real reasons were for the change in the presentation of the budgets of those two bodies. He requested a written explanation, in which connection the Secretariat might wish to consult the Legal Counsel. In addition, he noted that there was negative growth in the budget of the Joint Inspection Unit, whereas other oversight bodies were being provided with additional resources. He supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation in paragraph X.11 of its report regarding the proposal for 19 established regular posts for the Joint Inspection Unit.

62. **Ms. Silot** (Cuba) reiterated her delegation's concern over the system of net budgeting and recalled the Advisory Committee's recommendation in paragraph X.5 of its report. She regretted that no explanatory paper on the system had yet been submitted even though the Committee was on the point of adopting the proposed programme budget for the next biennium. She endorsed the comments of the representative of Algeria regarding application of the system to the budgets of the Joint Inspection Unit and the International Civil Service Commission.

63. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that the paper on net budgeting would shortly be issued as an official document of the Committee. Regarding the abolition of a post in the Joint Inspection Unit, the staff member concerned would be assigned to another post within the Organization, as was the practice in such cases.

64. **The Chairman** said that she would take it that the Committee had concluded its general debate on sections 29 and 30.

65. *It was so decided.*

Section 31. Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance

66. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Thailand) welcomed the importance accorded in the proposed programme budget to major maintenance, an area which, as explained in paragraph 31.5 of the proposed programme budget, had suffered seriously from budgetary restrictions. The progressive deterioration of United Nations facilities highlighted the need for preventive maintenance, the only cost-effective long-term solution. In view of new safety and environmental standards it would be wise to ensure that the renovation work took into consideration the interests of all the users of the buildings, including visitors, particularly in the case of United Nations Headquarters and the Palais des Nations at Geneva. His delegation supported the Advisory Committee's recommendations on the section as well as the appropriations requested.

67. **Ms. Buergo Rodriguez** (Cuba) endorsed the comments made by the representative of Thailand. The repeated deferral of essential maintenance work had caused innumerable problems. The situation could only worsen if the level of resources for such work was reduced over the next biennium. Her delegation wished to know when the renovation work in the Garage would be completed.

68. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines) endorsed the comments on section 31 made by the representative of Thailand. Her delegation accorded particular importance to resources and programmes aimed at making United Nations buildings more accessible to the handicapped.

69. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller), responding to the representative of Cuba, said that the Secretariat would make every effort to provide the information on the completion of

the work in the United Nations Garage as quickly as possible. The overall increase of $5 million proposed under the section was intended to partially restore the level of appropriations needed after the reduction of $12 million decided on by the General Assembly when it adopted the current programme budget.

70. **The Chairman** said that she would take it that the Fifth Committee had concluded its general debate on section 31.

71. *It was so decided.*

Section 32. Staff assessment

72. **The Chairman** said that, in the absence of comments by delegations, she would take it that the Committee had concluded its general debate on section 32.

73. *It was so decided.*

74. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) asked for the general debate on the various sections of the proposed programme budget to remain open until the Fifth Committee had received a written document summarizing the recommendations of the Advisory Committee and their financial implications.

75. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said he also thought that the general debate on the proposed programme budget should remain open until the reports to be submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/243 became available since the information concerning gratis personnel was directly related to the question of staff cuts.

76. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) asked the Controller to provide, before the start of the informal consultations, the information which had been requested on the Office to Combat Desertification and Drought, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the resources allocated to UNRWA. It was also essential to have the replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting by the representative of Egypt, particularly with regard to the breakdown of the planned post reductions in the translation and interpretation services. Also, his delegation wished to reiterate the importance of producing summary records of meetings in Chinese and Arabic, in conformity with the principle of parity between the official languages. Finally, it agreed that no decision on staff cuts could be made until such time as the reports on gratis personnel, which were to be submitted pursuant to resolution 51/243, became available.

77. **Ms. Buergo Rodriguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation must be provided, before the start of the informal consultations, with the clarifications or additional information it had requested concerning the various sections of the proposed programme budget. It was vital to know what were the consequences for the budget of the belated lifting of the freeze on recruitment. While a document on net budgeting would shortly be made available, the explanation required should have been provided in a timely manner, namely when ACABQ had highlighted the problems raised by net budgeting during the presentation of the budget outline.

78. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that he would like the general debate on the proposed programme budget to remain open so as to allow the European Union to comment subsequently on one of the sections.

Organization of work

79. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium) said that he was surprised, having examined the Committee's programme of work for the week, to see that the informal consultations scheduled for that afternoon, at which the pattern of conferences was to have been discussed, had been cancelled because of the plenary Assembly's consultations on United Nations reform. He wondered whether that decision was appropriate since, in his view, the programming of the Fifth Committee's meetings should not depend on the work of the plenary Assembly.

80. **Ms. Buergo Rodriguez** (Cuba), noting the changes to the programme of work, observed that the Bureau had not taken account of the comments made the previous day by certain delegations. Her own delegation wished to request that a list should be drawn up of all the outstanding questions relating to item 114 (Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations) before the start of the informal consultations on that item.

81. **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt) said that he agreed with the comments of the representative of Belgium. The Fifth Committee's meetings should be cancelled only when the plenary Assembly was considering questions that fell within the Committee's competence.

82. **Mr. Assah** (Togo) said that he also agreed with the comments of the representative of Belgium. He proposed that the informal consultations originally scheduled for that afternoon should begin at 2 p.m. and should be suspended during the meeting of the plenary Assembly, resuming once that meeting concluded.

83. **Mr. Smyth** (Ireland) said that the work of the other bodies of the General Assembly should not interfere with

that of the Fifth Committee. The Bureau should be given precise guidelines on that point. It was up to small delegations, like that of Ireland, to find a way of following the work of bodies that were of interest to them, without it being necessary to cancel meetings of the Fifth Committee. He would like to know how many meetings the Bureau had scheduled on agenda item 119 (Pattern of conferences) up to the end of the session.

84. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that it was premature, at the current point, to schedule night meetings. Those meetings should be reserved for the end of the session.

85. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) recalled that it was at the request of members of the Fifth Committee that the Bureau was not programming meetings at the same time as the plenary Assembly's deliberations on United Nations reform. It was clear that, in the future, the Committee should continue its work without taking account of the plenary Assembly's consultations on the reforms.

86. **Mr. Ho Tong Yen** (Singapore), responsible for coordinating the informal consultations on agenda item 119 (Pattern of conferences), recalled that it had been decided not to schedule night meetings unless they were absolutely necessary, which, in the present instance, was not the case. He was willing, for his part, to work with interested delegations during a morning or afternoon meeting.

87. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that there was a need to review the Committee's programme of work in its entirety and to rationalize it in the light of the approximate number of meetings necessary to enable the Committee to reach a decision on the various agenda items allocated to it.

88. **Mr. Armitage** (Australia) pointed out that the Bureau was in the best position to draw up the programme of work; it was important, however, to bear in mind that the issue at stake in the current debate was the optimal use of the conference services available to the various bodies. Every year, the resolution on the pattern of conferences emphasized that point and it was therefore vital that the Fifth Committee should set an example in that regard. From that point of view, it would be advisable to proceed with the informal consultations scheduled for that afternoon, with the proviso that they could be suspended during the meeting of the plenary Assembly.

89. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand) said that it ran counter to the concept of efficiency to cancel meetings at the last minute, even with the aim of enabling delegations, particularly small ones, to follow the work of the session as a whole. She fully supported the statements made by the representatives of Pakistan and Australia.

90. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium) said that, in his view, the problem should be resolved in the manner proposed by the representatives of Togo and Egypt, the representative of Singapore having indicated that he would be prepared to coordinate the informal consultations on agenda item 119 that afternoon, as planned.

91. **Mr. Oyugi** (Kenya) said that he supported the proposal of the representative of Togo. In his view, it would not be possible henceforth for the Fifth Committee to subordinate its work to that of the plenary Assembly. Any additional delay in carrying out the Committee's programme of work would inevitably lead to night meetings at a later stage, which would create problems for small delegations.

92. **The Chairman** said it appeared, from the statements made by delegations, that the Committee wished to hold informal consultations on agenda item 119 that afternoon.

93. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.